

HEALTH

HEALTH RECORDS ACT - LIMITED ACCESS ONLY

The Access to Health Records Act, which comes into effect on the first of this month, is only a partial, though much fought for victory. Despite its title, the Act will not allow people complete open access to their health files, but rather limited access governed by restrictions. For example, the Act does not apply to *any* records made before November 1, 1991; if you suspect that there are already questionable or incorrect files on yourself, this new Act offers no assistance. Health professionals can also withhold information if they believe that granting access would cause serious harm to the patient or anyone else. One of the worst problems is that health workers are not required under the Act to disclose whether or not information is being withheld, making it very difficult to challenge any exclusion, and leaving major decisions at doctors' discretion. Our lives are still very much in their hands: this Act is a small step in the right direction but we've got a very long way to go.

For further information about your rights under the Act, contact The Campaign For Freedom of Information on 071 253 2445 or The Greater London Association of Community Health Councils (GLACHC) on 071 387 2171



'We don't bother buying pesticides anymore.
We just spray the crops with our groundwater.'

DIRTY TRICKS!

While Britain is being taken to the European Court over its high levels of water pollution, millions of people's drinking water continue to be contaminated with harmful and often illegally high levels of pesticides and other chemicals. But instead of banning the poisonous chemicals, Environment Minister David Tripper announced last month that water companies would be spending £450 million to build 79 new water treatment plants to remove the pesticides and other residues, the costs of which will be passed on to consumers. That's capitalism for you!

RIDICULOUS RESEARCH

Brace yourselves for this one: courtesy of the men in white coats, supermarket shelves will soon be stocking a lab-engineered 'new tomato', containing transplanted fish genes - guaranteed, the scientists claim, to ensure a non-mushy tomato. No thanks, boys! Another dubious scientific gift is the heavily advertised 'Quorn'; described as 'mushroom-like', no information is given about its origins - the only certainty is it didn't spring from the ground!

UPDATE FEMALE CONDOM

For all those who read about the Female Condom on this page last month, apologies due: the condom, called 'Femidon', will not be available in shops til spring next year. The good news is that the Femidon is made of polyurethane, not rubber, and thus is *not* affected by oil-based lubricants. For further information contact The Grayling Company, 4 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3RA and watch this space!

MAMMOGRAM DANGER

In recent times, breast scanning, or mammography, has been much touted as the cure-all to prevent breast cancer, which kills over 15,000 women in Britain each year. But mammography, an often painful procedure in which the breast is crushed between two plates for X-ray, may pose other more serious

problems. A recent Canadian study looking at 50,000 women over an eight year period, found that scanning was of no benefit whatsoever to women under 50. For women over that age, it could actually increase a woman's risk of dying of breast cancer, by leading to surgery which actually speeds up the cancer's spread.

When a tumour is removed, radiotherapy is usually given immediately, followed by chemotherapy six to eight weeks later. According to the researchers, this treatment itself could make secondary tumours elsewhere grow faster, because the surgery and radiation damage the body's immune system. By the time the chemotherapy starts it may be too late to deal with the other, now increased growths.

KNOW YOUR MEDICINES

A Consumer's Guide To Prescription Medicines by Drs Barrington Cooper and Laurence Gerlis, published by Hamlyn, gives detailed lists of most prescription drugs, their effects, dosages and interactions with other medication. A useful antidote to the doctor who tells you only 'take it, it's good for you'. At good bookstores near you.

MORE ON VDU HAZARDS

A recent publication from the Labour Research Department looks into the health problems associated with working on computer video display units (VDUs), including eye disorders, repetitive strain injury, skin rash and stress. It also examines the evidence that VDUs pose serious dangers to women's reproductive health, especially during the early stages of pregnancy. *VDUs & Health and Safety - A User's Guide* is available for £1.60 from the Labour Research Department, 78 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HF

Staying Sane - Black Women and the Struggle for Mental Health - a community meeting to discuss the problems faced by Black women under the system. Nov 10 at 12-14 Thornton St, Brixton SW9. Creche provided - all Black women and men welcome

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